United Nations A/72/789/Add.1

General Assembly

Distr.: General
20 April 2018

Original: English

Seventy-second session
Agenda item 162
Financing of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara

Budget performance for the period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017 and proposed budget for the period from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019 of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

Appropriation for 2016/17	$52,550,400
Expenditure for 2016/17	$52,514,600
Unencumbered balance for 2016/17	$35,800
Appropriation for 2017/18	$52,000,000
Projected expenditure for 2017/18[a]	$52,000,000
Projected underexpenditure for 2017/18	$0
Proposal submitted by the Secretary-General for 2018/19	$53,878,200
Adjustment recommended by the Advisory Committee for 2018/19	$527,400
Recommendation of the Advisory Committee for 2018/19	$53,350,800

[a] Estimates as at 31 January 2018.

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I. Introduction

1. During its consideration of the financing of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information and clarification, concluding with written responses received on 11 April 2018. The documents reviewed and those used for background by the Committee are listed at the end of the present report. The comments and recommendations of the Committee on cross-cutting issues related to peacekeeping operations, including those pertaining to the findings and recommendations of the Board of Auditors on the United Nations peacekeeping operations for the period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017, can be found in its related report (A/72/789). The recommendations of the Board pertaining specifically to MINURSO are discussed in paragraph 5 below.

II. Budget performance report for the period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017

2. By its resolution 70/283, the General Assembly appropriated an amount of $52,550,400 gross ($50,214,300 net) for the maintenance of MINURSO for the period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017. Expenditures for the period totalled $52,514,600 gross ($50,319,500 net), reflecting a budget implementation rate of 99.9 per cent. The resulting unencumbered balance of $35,800, in gross terms, represents 0.1 per cent of the appropriation, reflecting the combined effect of: (a) higher-than-budgeted expenditures under military and police personnel ($1,291,000, or 19.1 per cent) and operational costs ($1,137,200, or 4.8 per cent); and (b) lower-than-budgeted expenditures under civilian personnel ($2,464,000, or 11.2 per cent). A detailed analysis of variances is provided in section IV of the report of the Secretary-General on the budget performance of the Mission for the period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017 (A/72/623).

3. It is indicated in the budget performance report that during the 2016/17 period, a total amount of $2,463,000 was redeployed from group II, civilian personnel, to group I, military and police personnel ($1,305,000), and group III, operational costs ($1,158,000) (ibid., para. 35). It is also indicated that, owing to the increased security threats faced by MINURSO and in response to the recommendations of a security risk assessment, the Mission reduced the number and area of patrols. In addition, the Mission's senior management increased the holdings of life-line supplies (engineering, transport and communications) to 90 days at all team sites and implemented unforeseen security-related activities, including: the drilling of a deep-water well at the Bir Lahlou team site to ensure a self-sustainable water supply; the acquisition of additional generators, water treatment equipment and fuel distribution equipment; the strengthening of security infrastructures; and the hiring of individual contractors to serve as supply drivers to five team sites across the berms. The additional requirements under facilities and infrastructure were offset in part by reduced requirements under ground transportation owing to the non-acquisition of the planned 12 heavy-duty vehicles (ibid., paras. 35 and 46–48).

4. The comments of the Advisory Committee on the information presented in the performance report on individual objects of expenditure can be found, where relevant, in the discussion of the proposed budget for the period from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019 (A/72/731) in section IV below.

5. In considering the reports of the Secretary-General on the financing of MINURSO, the Advisory Committee also had before it the report of the Board of

Auditors on the accounts of the United Nations peacekeeping operations for the financial period ended 30 June 2017 (A/72/5 (Vol. II), chap. II). In its report, the Board made observations and recommendations pertaining to the Mission on the following matters: (a) standard costing of property, plant and equipment (ibid., para. 22); (b) information sensitivity training (ibid., para. 411); and (c) energy production and consumption (ibid., paras. 444 and 449). **The Committee trusts that the recommendations of the Board of Auditors will be implemented expeditiously.**

III. Information on performance for the current period

6. With respect to current and projected expenditures for the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018, the Advisory Committee was informed that as at 31 January 2018, expenditures amounted to $33,553,800 (gross), and that at the end of the current financial period, the estimated total expenditures would amount to $52,000,000, reflecting full utilization of the appropriation for 2017/18.

7. The Advisory Committee was provided with information on the incumbency of MINURSO uniformed and civilian personnel as at 1 January 2018, as follows:

Category of personnel	*Posts authorized/approved 2017/18*[a]	*Posts encumbered*	*Vacancy rate (percentage)*
Military and police personnel			
Military observers	218	200	8.3
Military contingent personnel	27	27	–
United Nations police personnel	12	2	83.3
Civilian personnel			
Posts			
International staff	83	76	8.4
National staff[b]	167	160	4.2
United Nations Volunteers	18	16	11.1
Government-provided personnel	10	0	100

[a] Represents the highest authorized strength of military and police personnel and the number of approved posts for civilian personnel.

[b] Includes National Professional Officers and national General Service staff.

8. The Advisory Committee was also informed that all claims for the reimbursement of troop costs up to October 2017 had been settled, leaving an outstanding balance of $56,000 as at 31 December 2017. As at 31 January 2018, contingent-owned equipment had been certified and paid up to September 2017, leaving an outstanding balance of $63,000 as at 31 December 2017. With regard to death and disability compensation, as at 31 January 2018, an amount of $80,000 had been paid to settle two claims since the inception of the Mission, and no claims were pending.

9. In addition, the Advisory Committee was informed that, as at 27 February 2018, a total of $1,236,751,000 had been assessed on Member States in respect of the Mission since its inception. Payments received as at the same date amounted to $1,195,032,000, leaving an outstanding balance of $41,719,000.

10. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that MINURSO had historically suffered from a negative cash position owing to delays in receiving payments of assessed contributions from Member States. However, substantial payments of assessed contributions in September 2017 had improved the cash

position of the Mission, enabling it to make the quarterly reimbursement payments to the troop-contributing countries for standard troop costs for the period from November 2016 to October 2017 and for contingent-owned major equipment and self-sustainment for the period from October 2016 to September 2017. In addition, the Mission was able to repay the outstanding loan from the closed peacekeeping missions that it had earlier required to meet its operating costs. Notwithstanding the payments received, the cash position of the Mission amounted to $6.7 million as at 12 March 2018, which was insufficient to cover the three-month operating reserve of $13.0 million (excluding reimbursements to troop- and police-contributing countries). The total outstanding assessed contribution as at 13 March 2018 was $41.7 million.

11. **The Advisory Committee reiterates its concern that the cash position of the Mission does not cover the three-month operating cash reserve (see A/71/836/Add.1, para. 11). The Committee recalls that the General Assembly has repeatedly urged all Member States to fulfil their financial obligations, as set out in the Charter of the United Nations, on time, in full and without conditions (see Assembly resolution 71/303, para. 3).**

IV. Proposed budget for the period from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019

A. Mandate and planning assumptions

12. The mandate of MINURSO was established by the Security Council in its resolution 690 (1991). The most recent extension of the mandate of the Mission, until 30 April 2018, was approved by the Security Council in its resolution 2351 (2017) of 28 April 2017.

13. Information on the planning assumptions and mission support initiatives for the 2018/19 period is provided by the Secretary-General in paragraphs 6 to 21 of his report on the proposed budget for MINURSO for 2018/19 (A/72/731). As the Secretary-General indicates, the Mission will, inter alia: (a) reorganize its support component in line with the harmonization of mission support structures in field missions, under which the Chief of Mission Support is supported by two pillars, namely, Operations and Resource Management and Supply Chain and Service Delivery Management; (b) focus on environmental activities, including waste management, water and sanitation; (c) optimize its vehicle fleet; and (d) transfer transactional functions and non-location-dependent support services to the Regional Service Centre in Entebbe, Uganda, which has been made possible by the implementation of Umoja. The Secretary-General also indicates that security continues to be a growing concern and that MINURSO is proposing further high-priority security improvements in the 2018/19 period (see para. 25 below).

14. The Advisory Committee was informed that the proposed restructuring of the Mission Support Division was in line with the guidance provided by the Department of Field Support. The Mission was proposing to restructure those areas of its support component that were most relevant to meet its immediate requirements by redeploying and retraining existing staff to address skills gaps in areas such as acquisition and requisition planning, warehousing, supply and logistics.

B. Resource requirements

15. The proposed budget for MINURSO for the period from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019 amounts to $53,878,200 gross ($51,641,100 net), representing an increase of

$1,878,200, or 3.6 per cent, in gross terms, compared with the appropriation of $52,000,000 for 2017/18. This reflects proposed increases under military and police personnel ($134,200, or 1.8 per cent), civilian personnel ($898,300, or 4.8 per cent) and operational costs ($845,700, or 3.3 per cent). Detailed information on the financial resources proposed and an analysis of variances are provided in sections II and III, respectively, of the proposed budget (ibid.).

1. Military and police personnel

Category	*Authorized 2017/18*[a]	*Proposed 2018/19*	*Variance*
Military observers	218	218	–
Military contingent personnel	27	27	–
United Nations police	12	12	–

[a] Represents the highest level of authorized strength.

16. The proposed resources for military and police personnel for 2018/19 amount to $7,462,000, reflecting an increase of $134,200, or 1.8 per cent, compared with the appropriation for 2017/18. As indicated in paragraph 64 of the proposed budget (ibid.), the increase reflects additional requirements under military observers ($176,500, or 2.9 per cent), attributable primarily to the higher provision for mission subsistence allowance, owing to the application of a lower average vacancy rate of 8.0 per cent in the budget compared with the rate of 10.0 per cent applied in the 2017/18 period, as well as higher requirements for rations due to the appreciation of the Moroccan dirham and the euro against the United States dollar. The increase under military observers would be offset in part by lower requirements under military contingents ($31,900, or 3 per cent) and United Nations police ($10,400, or 16.5 per cent).

17. **The Advisory Committee recommends the approval of the Secretary-General's proposals for military and police personnel.**

2. Civilian personnel

Category	*Approved 2017/18*	*Proposed 2018/19*	*Variance*
Posts			
International staff	83	82	(1)
National staff[a]	167	163	(4)
United Nations Volunteers	18	18	–
Government-provided personnel	10	10	–
Total	**278**	**273**	**(5)**

[a] Includes National Professional Officers and national General Service staff.

18. The proposed resources for civilian personnel for 2018/19 amount to $19,779,800, reflecting an increase of $898,300, or 4.8 per cent, compared with the appropriation for 2017/18. The Secretary-General indicates that the increase reflects higher requirements under: (a) international staff ($636,800, or 4.9 per cent), attributable to the application of a lower vacancy rate of 10.0 per cent compared with the 15.0 per cent applied in 2017/18, as well as a higher salary scale and higher common staff costs compared with the 2017/18 period; (b) national staff ($148,000, or 2.8 per cent), attributable primarily to the 7.7 per cent appreciation of the Moroccan dirham against the United States dollar; and (c) United Nations Volunteers ($102,900,

or 23.5 per cent), attributable primarily to the application of a lower vacancy rate of 20.0 per cent compared with the 40.0 per cent applied in the 2017/18 period. The increased requirements would be offset in part by reduced requirements resulting from the proposed abolishment of five posts.

Recommendations on posts and positions

19. A total of 273 civilian posts and positions are proposed for 2018/19, comprising 82 international posts, 163 national staff posts, 18 United Nations Volunteer positions and 10 Government-provided personnel positions. The staffing proposals for 2018/19 reflect a decrease of five posts compared with the number of approved posts for 2017/18, through the abolishment of one international staff post and four national General Service posts.

Abolishment

20. A total of five posts are proposed for abolishment, as follows:

(a) In the Finance and Budget Section, one post of Cashier (Field Service) and one post of Team Assistant (national General Service) are proposed for abolishment in view of the transfer of their functions to the Regional Service Centre in Entebbe following the implementation of Umoja (ibid., paras. 20 and 38);

(b) In the Human Resources Section, one post of Travel Assistant (national General Service) and one post of Human Resources Assistant (national General Service) are proposed for abolishment in view of the transfer of transactional functions to the Regional Service Centre in Entebbe following the implementation of Umoja (ibid., paras. 20 and 39);

(c) In the Surface Transport Section, one post of Heavy Vehicle Operator (national General Service) is proposed for abolishment, as the Mission plans to engage five individual contractors for heavy-duty vehicle driving to provide support to engineering projects east of the berm (ibid., paras. 20 and 45; see also para. 33 below).

Redeployment and reassignment

21. The changes related to the proposed restructuring of the mission support component (see paras. 13–14 above) are summarized in a figure under paragraph 33 of the proposed budget and in annex II thereto. Details on the proposed changes are provided in paragraphs 30 to 51 of the proposed budget. The Advisory Committee was informed that, in addition to the proposed abolishment of 5 posts (see para. 20 above), the proposed restructuring involved the redeployment of 49 posts and the reassignment of 2 posts.

22. **The Advisory Committee recommends the approval of the Secretary-General's proposals for civilian staff.**

23. The Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that the proportion of female staff was 27.3 per cent among Professional staff and 19.0 per cent among national staff. **The Committee encourages MINURSO to renew its efforts to increase the representation of women among its staff.**

3. Operational costs

(United States dollars)

	Apportioned 2017/18	*Proposed 2018/19*	*Variance*
Operational costs	25 790 700	26 636 400	845 700

24. The proposed resources for operational costs for 2018/19 amount to $26,636,400, reflecting an increase of $845,700, or 3.3 per cent, compared with the appropriation for 2017/18. The Secretary-General proposes increases under facilities and infrastructure ($804,400, or 20.3 per cent), ground transportation ($465,200, or 31.6 per cent) and other supplies, services and equipment ($277,500, or 5.7 per cent). The increased requirements would be offset in part by lower requirements under air transportation ($558,200, or 4.7 per cent) and communications and information technology ($141,400, or 4.8 per cent).

Facilities and infrastructure

25. The proposed resources for facilities and infrastructure amount to $4,771,000, representing an increase of $804,400, or 20.3 per cent, compared with the appropriation for the 2017/18 period. The Secretary-General indicates that the increased requirements are attributable primarily to the acquisition and installation of five prefabricated bunkers east of the berm and of boom gates to block vehicular access through controlled points, in order to provide a more secure environment for all Mission personnel. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that a security risk assessment conducted in December 2016 had resulted in the recommendation that bunkers be acquired as part of security risk management/mitigation measures that had been endorsed by the Department of Safety and Security. The Committee was also informed that the cost of one unit of containerized bunkers was estimated at $180,000 on the basis of a similar product purchased by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya.

26. The proposed resources for construction, alteration, renovation and major maintenance amount to $1,164,100, the same level as the appropriation for 2017/18. The supplementary information provided to the Advisory Committee shows that expenditures for 2017/18 as at 31 January 2018 amounted to $208,900, less than 20 per cent of the appropriation for the period. For the acquisition of office and other equipment, the resources proposed for 2018/19 amount to $76,000, reflecting an increase of $1,000, or 1.3 per cent, compared with the appropriation of $75,000 for 2017/18. The supplementary information provided to the Committee shows that expenditures for the 2017/18 period as at 31 January 2018 amounted to $3,900 and that actual expenditures for 2016/17 amounted to $11,700, or 15.6 per cent of the appropriation of $75,000.

27. **In view of the pattern of expenditures, the Advisory Committee recommends that the proposed resources for facilities and infrastructure for 2018/19 be reduced by 5 per cent, from $4,771,000 to $4,532,500.**

Ground transportation

28. The proposed resources for ground transportation amount to $1,937,800, reflecting an increase of $465,200, or 31.6 per cent, compared with the appropriation for 2017/18. The Secretary-General indicates that the increased requirements are attributable primarily to the acquisition of a real-time geolocation system to allow the tracking of the movement of the Mission's vehicle fleet and of ballistic blankets for vehicles; as well as higher costs for the rental of vehicles due to the introduction of a

new shuttle bus service contract to facilitate the movement of the Mission's civilian and military personnel in and around the Laayoune metropolitan area, as a result of the reduction in the light vehicle fleet. The Secretary-General also indicates that the Mission plans to optimize, reduce and upgrade its vehicle fleet through the acquisition of vehicles in good condition from downsized and closed peacekeeping missions (ibid., para. 17).

29. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that MINURSO would receive the following vehicles from the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI): 77 4x4 vehicles for patrols by military observers; 5 ambulances for medical support at various locations; 3 vans for service delivery; 5 minibuses for the transport of personnel; 1 water truck for team site support in the desert; 2 airfield baggage tractors for use at airfields; and 1 mobile crane and 1 teleporter forklift for general mechanical handling operations. The cost of the shipping of the vehicles was estimated at $326,000. Furthermore, the Committee was informed that the Mission also intended to transfer a total of 22 medium-duty vehicles to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). **The Committee questions the approach taken to acquire 77 vehicles from UNMIL and UNOCI, while at the same time transferring 22 vehicles to UNIFIL and incurring shipping costs for both the acquisition and transfer of vehicles. The Committee therefore recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to maintain the available jeeps at MINURSO and reduce the corresponding number of vehicles of the same type to be acquired from UNMIL and UNOCI, thereby avoiding unnecessary shipping costs.**

30. Upon request for further information on the rental of vehicles, the Advisory Committee was informed that the Mission intended to enter into a shuttle bus service contract with a local service provider for four medium-sized buses (with a capacity of more than 15 passengers) operating a shuttle service between Laayoune locations, including the airport, from 5.30 a.m. to 8.30 p.m. seven days a week, with a standby taxi service being provided outside those hours utilizing one minibus with a capacity of up to 15 passengers. The supplementary information provided to the Committee shows that a provision of $150,000 is included in the proposed budget for 2018/19 for the rental of vehicles. The Committee was also informed that the Mission expected to receive five minibuses with an eight-passenger capacity from closed peacekeeping missions. **In view of the planned acquisition of five additional minibuses from closed peacekeeping operations, the Committee is not convinced about the requirement for the rental of vehicles. Accordingly, the Committee recommends against the approval by the General Assembly of the proposed resources for the shuttle bus service contract and the rental of four medium-sized buses, and recommends that the proposed resources for ground transportation be reduced by $150,000.**

Communications and information technology

31. The proposed requirements under communications and information technology amount to $2,778,700 for 2018/19. The supplementary information provided to the Advisory Committee shows that, for the current period, actual expenditures incurred as at 31 January 2018 amounted to: (a) $127,700, against a provision of $849,000, for communications and information technology equipment; and (b) $1,900, against a provision of $265,300, for spare parts. The proposed resources for 2018/19 amount to $847,000 under communications and information technology equipment and $211,900 under spare parts. **In view of the pattern of expenditures, the Committee recommends that the proposed resources for communications and information technology in 2018/19 be reduced by 5 per cent, from $2,778,700 to $2,639,800.**

Other supplies, services and equipment

32. The proposed resources for other supplies, services and equipment amount to $5,105,200, reflecting an increase of $277,500, or 5.7 per cent of the appropriation for 2017/18. The supplementary information provided to the Advisory Committee indicates that the increase includes an amount of $207,400 for the recruitment of four additional individual contractors (heavy-duty vehicle drivers and mechanics) to transport life-sustainment supplies across the berm.

33. Upon request for further information on the reason for the proposed recruitment of four individual contractors given that only one post of Heavy Vehicle Operator was proposed for abolishment, the Advisory Committee was informed that at present, the vehicles were driven by five local staff (Heavy Vehicle Drivers) in the region west of the berm, and by five international individual contractors from the west of the berm to the east of the berm. The Committee was also informed that since national staff were not allowed to cross the berm, international staff members had been recruited to drive heavy vehicles throughout the year to ensure the delivery of life-sustainment supplies and equipment to the east of the berm. However, the rough terrain and inclement desert conditions had taken a heavy toll on the health and physical condition of the staff members, which had resulted in their being on sick leave for protracted periods of time and had eventually led to the agreed termination of the staff members concerned. Considering the above experience, the Mission expected that the proposed arrangement involving the recruitment of individual contractors for an average of 9 months during a period of 12 consecutive months (within the limits stipulated in sect. 5.9 of the administrative instruction on consultants and individual contractors (ST/AI/2013/4)) would minimize the adverse impact of the driving of the heavy vehicles on the health of the drivers while ensuring the timely delivery of life-sustainment supplies and equipment for engineering projects to the remote team sites east of the berm. **The Committee questions the proposed arrangements for the driving of vehicles. It trusts that this matter will be kept under review, and that the Secretary-General will report on the effectiveness of the proposed arrangements in his next performance report on MINURSO.**

Mine detection

34. The Secretary-General proposes resources at the maintenance level, in the amount of $3,265,200, for mine detection and mine-clearing services in 2018/19. Details on the planned activities are provided in paragraphs 61 and 62 of the budget document. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that an initial survey concerning landmines and explosive remnants of war conducted in 2006 had indicated that approximately 357 km^2 of land east of the berm was contaminated. From 2006 to 2015, approximately 84.5 km^2 of land had been released through mine action survey and clearance, with a further 53 km^2 released between 1 June 2015 and 28 February 2018. The Committee was also informed that, on the basis of current data, it was estimated that there remained approximately 219.5 km^2 of contaminated land east of the berm, of which 54.9 per cent (120.5 km^2) was located in the buffer strip and was not currently accessible for demining purposes. Accordingly, there remained approximately 99 km^2 of contaminated land east of the berm that required survey and/or clearance. In addition, the Committee was informed that, should the security situation and resources for mine action operations remain at the current levels, it was expected that all known residual contamination areas would be released in the 2021/22 period.

35. **Subject to its recommendations in paragraphs 27, 29, 30 and 31 above, the Advisory Committee recommends the approval of the Secretary-General's proposals for operational costs.**

V. Conclusion

36. The actions to be taken by the General Assembly in connection with the financing of MINURSO for the period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017 are indicated in section V of the performance report (A/72/623). **The Advisory Committee recommends that the unencumbered balance of $35,800 for the period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017, as well as other income/adjustments amounting to $1,695,300 for the period ended 30 June 2017, be credited to Member States.**

37. The actions to be taken by the General Assembly in connection with the financing of MINURSO for the period from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019 are indicated in section IV of the proposed budget (A/72/731). **Taking into account its recommendations in paragraphs 27, 29, 30 and 31 above, the Advisory Committee recommends that the proposed resources be reduced by $527,400, from $53,878,200 to $53,350,800. Accordingly, the Committee recommends that the General Assembly appropriate the amount of $53,350,800 for the maintenance of the Mission for the 12-month period from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019.**

Documentation

- Report of the Secretary-General on the budget performance of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara for the period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017 (A/72/623)
- Report of the Secretary-General on the budget for the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara for the period from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019 (A/72/731)
- Report of the Board of Auditors on United Nations peacekeeping operations for the 12-month period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017 (A/72/5 (Vol. II), chap. II)
- Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the recommendations of the Board of Auditors concerning United Nations peacekeeping operations for the financial period ended 30 June 2017 (A/72/756)
- Report of the Secretary-General on the overview of the financing of United Nations peacekeeping operations: budget performance for the period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017 and budget for the period from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019 (A/72/770)
- Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the budget performance for the period from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016 and proposed budget for the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018 of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (A/71/836/Add.1)
- General Assembly resolutions 70/283 and 71/309 on the financing of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara
- Security Council resolutions 2351 (2017) and 690 (1991)